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Leahy: Nation 'badly hurt' if spy case charges are true

By John McCaslin
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Criticism of the U.S. government's security policy continued yesterday when a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee said security is not taken seriously enough in the United States.

Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., said if charges against the accused father-son spy team of John and Michael Walker are correct, the country has been "badly hurt."

The Walkers were arrested by federal agents last week on espionage charges for passing top secret documents to the Soviet Union.

The dispute surrounding government security checks was reported in The Washington Times last week after Office of Personnel Management General Counsel Joseph A. Morris said background investigations on military personnel and contractors are the "soft underbelly" of the government's security program.

Senior Pentagon officials were quick to reject those charges, saying the quality of security checks with regard to the military "are better" than those for civilian personnel.

But Sen. Leahy noted yesterday that over 4 million Americans have security clearances "and we classify about 20 million documents a year.

"And I think we're doing a very poor job, especially when the Soviets and the Soviet bloc countries have nearly 1,000 active agents in the United States trying to ferret out these secrets," he said on the CBS-TV Morning News show.

Commenting on the Walker case, Sen. Leahy said, "I think we've been badly hurt if [the Soviets] are able to follow the kind of code we've been using, especially if they have our recordings of virtually all our transmissions.

"I think we've only seen the tip of the iceberg because the Soviets are able to go back and reconstruct so much. I don't think it's going to be possible to calculate the enormous damage in this case," he said.

The focus this week will be on Baltimore federal court, as preliminary hearings get under way for John Anthony Walker Jr., the retired Navy communications specialist, and his son, Navy Seaman Michael Lance Walker, each charged with spying for the Soviet Union.

Seaman Walker, 22, who entered the Navy in 1982 and was assigned to the USS Nimitz's operations office, was returned to the United States from Israel on Saturday and will appear this morning before a federal magistrate in Baltimore.

His 47-year-old father, who retired from the Navy in 1976 after 21 years of service and



Sen. Patrick Leahy

later became a Norfolk private investigator, will have a preliminary hearing tomorrow in Baltimore federal court.

John Walker was arrested in Rockville last week after a bag containing 129 secret documents — which he allegedly dropped off near Poolesville for a Soviet agent — was recovered by FBI agents. Michael Walker was charged with espionage only days later, after 15 pounds of classified documents were found adjacent to his bunk aboard the Nimitz.

The FBI refused yesterday to confirm reports that John Walker's former wife Barbara and daughter Cynthia Walker, who live in West Dennis, Mass., provided a tip about three months ago that eventually led agents to the discovery of espionage activity.

"We don't reveal our sources," said an FBI spokesman.

Calls to several family members went unanswered yesterday, including one to Michael Walker's wife, Rachel, 22, of Virginia Beach.

The FBI expects to arrest other Americans in the case, which according to retired Adm. Elmo Zumwalt Jr., a former chief of naval operations, may have caused a greater breach of Navy security than ever before encountered.

Some officials believe John Walker may have been spying for the Soviet Union for as long as 18 years.